

Director's Remarks, July 2010

Performance

We have now had eight years in a row of increasing circulation per hour open. Even disregarding disparities in hours open, newness of buildings in ideal locations, and the effective buying power of book budgets, we have never had equal success since the early 1980s, and only once (1932) before that time period.

Due to a phenomenal June 2010 (92,722 circulations), the Library ended the year 36,783 circulations higher than last year (837,722 for 2010, 800,555 for 2009, and 90,381 for June 2009). This amounts to a 4.6% gain over last year. However, the division of our book budget into new priority areas did not take place until mid-October last year. Almost all of this gain came from our previous collection policy (4.1% of the 4.6% gain came from the July – December 2009 time period before new materials ordered in October had reached the shelves).

The tripling of the juvenile book budget has had a negligible effect on circulation. In May & June 2009, 33,843 preschool books were checked out. In May & June 2010, 31,002 were checked out. Looking at the same months, there were 12,260 circs of juvenile fiction in 2009 compared to 12,633 in 2010. The same pattern is repeated in most adult fiction categories. Doubling expenditures on DVDs did enable an increase from 21,644 circs in 2009 to 25,366 in 2010, but the increase in checkouts of DVDs for May & June 2010 (3,722) accounts for nearly all the increase from all sources for January-June of 2009 (412,785) in comparison to January – June 2010 (416,510, for a gain of 3,725). Nearly everything we have gained in new emphases on the small percentage of popular areas has been lost in declines for the high percentage of less favored areas.

When discussing the conclusions about juvenile spending in the consultant's report, I suggested (p. 3, *Build a Better Library*) the following:

The high circulation of children's materials is highly dependent on very expensive programming and marketing to encourage reading and the length of the books (e.g. preschool readers are very short, so many can be checked out). We do not spend this programming and marketing money for any other area of the collection, and it needs to be figured into the cost & benefit analysis of use. Children can go through several picture books in a single hour and parents check them out in quantity.

I believe that parents and children were already checking out materials at their capacity due to our excellent children's programming. In distributing a very low book budget, assumptions about increasing already heavy use has to be matched against the capacity to do more with existing patrons, staff, facilities, and hours. This is not an argument against new priorities, but rather in favor of effective marketing and improved access to services. We are unlikely to see huge gains until we can radically increase our number of users.

Brainerd

The City has completed a deal for the former Postal Services Center building southeast of and adjacent to the Brainerd Mission Cemetery. By all accounts, it is a well-made building with a large open interior and there is abundant free parking across the road from it. As we understand it, the City will take ownership in early August and the lease for our existing branch (which expires on November 1) will not be renewed. As yet, the Library has not had an opportunity to ask all the questions relevant to choosing a new location, figuring costs, finding sources of funds, or setting a schedule. However, we expect these questions will be answered at a meeting with the City once it takes ownership of the property.

Facilities Master Plan & New Strategic Plan (Board approval requested)

Bob McNulty from the Partners for Livable Communities spent about 5 hours on Wednesday, May 5 touring Brainerd and our downtown building with a City/Library Task Force/River City delegation. Their primary focus was on visioning statements for the Brainerd development (David Barlew/Artech) and the downtown library (Professor Joshua Emig from Auburn). It is not in the best interest of the Library to be passive recipients as opposed to active participants in a plan for any future system.

Can we now join forces with the Regional Planning Agency and local governments to build a master plan for development? The City and County will spend the next fiscal year deciding our fate (renegotiating the sales tax agreement expiring in May 2011) based on where they think we ought to be headed. It seems in our best interest to work with them on a sustainable future, one based on available sources for funding. Without such a plan, we risk alienating communities like Soddy-Daisy that need a branch library, but also isolation from politically popular but poorly planned alternatives (e.g. Signal Mountain & East Ridge). The Brainerd community is building momentum for a new branch, but has a very nebulous sense of optimal placement and size. Several representing Soddy-Daisy have expressed frustration with our failure to offer a concrete plan for their area. Recent designs for a new downtown library by a group of Auburn graduate students raise questions about what we are doing to fix our problems downtown.

The Library Taskforce established a two-year strategic plan that will expire at the end of June 2011. We will need to begin planning the budget for the following year (FY2012) in about eight months. We have new data from national and local surveys of library patrons. Can we begin setting up a strategic planning effort with Karen McMahon and the Library Taskforce or on our own?

Reorganization Downtown

We hope that our request for carpeting will be approved this month so that we can finish the second floor, shift and label all the books, and clear out the first floor prior to our annual fundraiser. The plan is to carpet one half of the space, coordinate a massive shifting of books and shelving as quickly as possible, carpet the remaining half, and then shift the remaining materials off the first floor prior to the October 16 event. The first floor will be carpeted afterward. We expect to be fully engaged in finishing this downtown project for the rest of the calendar year. Whatever staff we can afford, once the budget is settled in August, will be used to maintain or expand service hours.

Automation

We lost service because two cheap network devices were fried in a power surge. As soon as replacement units arrived, we found three other cheap units were malfunctioning for other reasons. We

are using Friends director's discretionary funds to order replacements for these three units. All the branches are now back up and key downtown computer connections are being rerouted through other equipment.

Our Internet infrastructure is an amalgam of small switches, hubs, and routers that pass Internet traffic back and forth from all connected devices. These are supposed to be deployed on a frame and plugged into protective units that suppress power surges and provide battery backup and have been operating for a number of years without any problem. However, a recent power surge revealed that some of the cheaper units were not plugged into protected sockets. This will be corrected immediately.

Over the past five years, we have radically increased bandwidth (from 1 to 100 megabytes per second) and added more public computers to accommodate the huge public demand for Internet service. We have pushed our old equipment beyond normal service limits. The three additional units we are replacing are only functioning intermittently because they are being asked to do twice what they were designed to accomplish.

The long term answer is to upgrade our entire automation infrastructure including the fifteen-year-old printers used by the public, a new automation system that operates on a much cheaper computer, and a working self-check system that would reduce manual checkouts by 80-90%.